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CONTINUING

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IN previous numbers of this journal we have emphasized the value of certain lines of study as preparatory to the study of the life and teaching of Jesus or as accompanying it. The foreshadowings and prophecies of the Christ in the Old Testament, the history of events, and, still more, the history of thought in Palestine in the days of Jesus, the structure of the Gospels themselves and their relations to one another—all these contribute to an understanding of Jesus and of his teaching. But the very saying of this implies that Jesus himself is the highest theme of biblical study. These other topics, large and important as they are, worthy as they might be of study for themselves, find their highest significance as means by which we may reach an understanding of the personality and teaching of Jesus. To exalt prophecy, history, and environment into the place of first importance, and thus to obscure the central figure of Jesus himself would be a mistake than which there could hardly be a more serious one in biblical study. All roads must lead to Rome; all biblical study must find its centre in Jesus Christ.

THIS is indeed no new discovery of our day. The thought is centuries old. Yet it has, we believe, been set in a new light, and received a fresh and powerful emphasis in our day. The modern study of the Bible which has emphasized the value of the subsidiary and contributory studies by insisting upon the

necessity of studying every portion of the Bible from the standpoint of the time in which it was produced has been led by this very study to a new perception of the unity of the Bible and the central position of Jesus Christ.

NEVER perhaps was it so clearly perceived as it is today that alike in the field of Christian apologetics and in that of biblical interpretation the central question is the question concerning Christ himself. The apologist has learned that outposts which once seemed absolutely essential may be surrendered not only without surrendering Christianity, but even with the effect of making more manifest its real impregnability. But this has only served to make more plain the fact that we cannot surrender Jesus Christ without surrendering everything. The interpreter has found it necessary to abandon many cherished interpretations, even of those which had formerly seemed to bind all the book to Christ. Yet when he has had time to recover from his first shock of surprise he has found, often if not always, that if historical study took away with one hand she has more than repaid with the other. If, for a moment, any book has seemed, by the interpretation which a study of history compelled us to give it, to lose all relation to Jesus, a broader historical study has presently made that relation more evident even than before. If once we thought that each prophet stood on the circumference of a circle and turned his eyes full on the Christ at the centre, while now we have come to think rather of the ceaseless procession of the seers, each peering into the half-revealed future, and stirring the hearts of his contemporaries with the portrayal of the dim, but majestic figure of God's great Deliverer to come, a figure growing with each new seer more glorious and more distinct, yet never approaching in clearness or in glory the reality which appeared in the person of Jesus Christ—if we have thus modified our conception of the Messiah of the prophets, this has been by no means to surrender, but only to emphasize the fact that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. As apologetics finds in Jesus its central citadel, never surrendered, always impregnable, so interpretation finds in

him its highest goal. To him all Bible study rightly leads. In understanding him it attains its highest reward.

BUT it is not enough that Bible study lead to Jesus. For we never rightly understand him or his teachings until we penetrate to that central thought which finds expression alike in his character and in his teaching. A mastery of the details of the life of Jesus is good ; a study of his teachings, severally and separately, is good. Indeed such study is indispensable as a step leading to the apprehension of the teaching and the person in their unity. The whole cannot be perceived as a whole till the parts have been seen as parts. To attempt to reverse this order would be to violate the natural and necessary order of acquiring knowledge. But to stop short with the parts would be to leave unattained the highest possibilities. It would be difficult to urge too strongly the necessity of knowing as thoroughly as may be the events of the life of Jesus, and of understanding his separate teachings. But it would be equally difficult to emphasize too strongly the wisdom of pressing on beyond this and trying to gain, if possible, a unified conception of Jesus himself, and an apprehension of the central principle of his teaching.

OBVIOUSLY this is a large task, one which must be prosecuted with patience and persistence. It is doubtless also one which must be approached by successive stages and from various points of view. One cannot pass at once from the details of the life of Jesus to sum up his character and teaching in one all-inclusive idea. But it is possible to hold before one's self as the goal of study the attaining of as perfectly unified and comprehensive a conception as possible of the character and teaching of Jesus, and to prosecute the whole work with this object in view. Having first gained a knowledge of the details of the life of Jesus so far as known to us, the student may seek to bring all this knowledge to bear upon some one aspect or phase of the character or teaching of Jesus ; and then finally endeavor to unify the several results thus obtained in a comprehensive view of Jesus, the person and the teacher. Thus, to speak of the character of Jesus,

one may study his conduct as a personal friend, as a teacher, as a healer of disease, as a controversialist. Or, to speak of his teaching, one may take up such themes as Jesus' teaching concerning the Sabbath, concerning prayer, concerning the authority of law, seeking under each topic to gain a full view of our Lord's teaching and to unite the several elements, if it be possible, into a unified statement of Jesus' teaching on this topic. Still further, to unify these several results into a statement on the one hand of the central element of Christ's character, and on the other of the central principle of all his teaching is no slight problem. Yet students of the New Testament can hardly rest content till they have accomplished this also. Nor will they be content till they have perceived and defined the relation between the central principle of Christ's teaching and the central element of his character.

THIS is manifestly not the place to attempt to accomplish the task thus suggested. Far more space would be required than we have at our command. We venture, however, to raise the question whether, when we bring all these several lines of our study to a focus, the central principle of Christ's teaching and the central element of his character will not be found in the simple thought of the supremacy of truth, the authority of reality. When we study his conduct attentively, do we not discover that he is everywhere dominated by what may not inappropriately be called a *passion for reality*? When we examine his teachings, do we find anything more ultimate than this, his insistence that all teaching and all conduct must be consonant with the ultimate realities of things?

This was with him far more than a mere abhorrence of vulgar sham and shallow hypocrisy, it was a consuming love of truth, which refused to be content with any reason for usage or precept or institution which did not root itself in reality. There was no place for fasting among his disciples, because so long as he was with them it would stand for no reality, would be a mere form without significance. The pharisaic prohibition of murder is to him wholly inadequate, if not even worse than useless,

because it touches the mere surface of action, and wholly ignores the far deeper realities of the heart. His ultimate word respecting the Sabbath is, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Deeper than this it is not possible to go. Is not even his reaffirmation of the Old Testament principle of love as the sum and substance of moral law based on the fact that this law of love is the central moral idea of the universe written in the constitution of things?

HAS philosophy, ancient or modern, been able to discover a nobler or profounder principle of thought and action than this appeal to reality? Has ever philosopher or moralist so illustrated this principle in precept or in practice as it was illustrated in the teaching and life of Jesus?